Literary Essays

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by

Ethan Lewis

Cambridge
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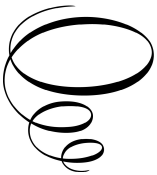

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This book first published 2020

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library



ISBN (10): 1-5275-4153-3
ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-4153-5

For Robert and Deborah Kuhn McGregor,
who
"Taught me between the hammer and the block
To face the music…to listen,
To strike it rich behind the linear black."

—Seamus Heaney, *Clearances*

# Contents

# Foreword

> "This music crept by me upon the waters"
> And along the Strand, up Queen Victoria Street.
> O City city, I can sometimes hear
> Beside a public bar in Lower Thames Street,
> The pleasant whining of a mandoline
> And a clatter and a chatter from within
> Where fishmen lounge at noon: *where the walls*
> *Of Magnus Martyr hold*
> *Inexplicable splendour of Ionian white and gold.*

The close to this passage from *The Waste Land* mirrors to some degree the sentiment expressed. For though we can laud the alliterative cadence, remark the crescendo enacted by the shift from closed to open vowels, and account for the exotic brightness (genuine *brilliance*) that the last half–dozen words cast on the mind's eye, these lines, like so many, transcend any contemplation on their operation. Even so, the analogy forwarded by Stephen Booth in his comprehensive commentary on *Shakespeare's Sonnets* still pertains. "Any reader superstitiously fearful that the magic of a poem will vanish with knowledge of its sources need not worry any more than a student of zoology need worry that gazelles will slow down if he investigates the reasons they can run so fast". One must, however, with respect to the stanza under scrutiny, amend Booth to avoid a causal fallacy. I've not discerned, really, "the reasons" for the effectiveness of Eliot's lines; rather, observed *attributes* of their excellence—which, yes, may contribute to their effect. Thus, I concur with Booth that much of the "complexity" he records contributes to "the sense [the *Sonnets*] give of effortless control of the uncontrollable. The notes to this edition investigate the particulars of th[at] complexity."[1] So, likewise, would my "notes," essays, lectures compassed in this collect, exploring on occasion authors' seamless mastery in presentation of phenomena—but scrutinizing method in many other matters besides. Always with intent to enhance appreciation of technique, or garner insight of what the artists disclose about the human condition.

Eliot's lines, then, at one remove, themselves analogize my text's objective. Disclaimer notwithstanding, their own resonant splendour captures something of the cathedral's transcendent shine. A literary critic aspires to eloquence, though makes no pretense to mirror the sublimity of the monuments inspiring his endeavors. Poets articulate their admiration through other works of art, critics express their homage by analyzing art's workings.

Parts One and Two derive from seminars conducted at the University of Illinois–Springfield. *"The Shakespeare Project XXXI—Reconfiguring the Authorship Query"* comprises pieces on *Antony and Cleopatra,* in conjunction with John Dryden's *All for Love;* and on *Timon of Athens* anent Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire*. *Modern British Literature: -ists, Contemporaries, Others* focuses on four novels that challenge literary categorization and reexamine relation and identity: Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*, D. H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow*, E. M. Forster's *Howards End*, and Samuel Beckett's *Molloy*.

*A Collocation* compasses writings of varied length on—with the exception of an excursus on Richard III—works or poets lesser known, hence underappreciated; and reflections prompted by others' suggestions and by lifelong preoccupations. Wendy Cope, John Frederick Nims, and Nescio may to some readers prove as revelatory as to me. A piquant partnership of Mallarmé and Ashbery, and two *Lives*—of Leopold Bloom and Jesus Christ, respectively—round out this cohort.

The book concludes with *Stand Alone Notes, or A Catchsome*: obiter dicta culled usually from the back matter of essays or syllabi, yet complete, discrete mini-musings.

Such divagations that comprise Part IV having always proved part and parcel of my practice, I hope readers will construe the discursive footnotes to the other pieces herein as, if not central matter, still relevant, enjoyable text. —E. L.

## Note

1. *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, edited with analytic commentary by Stephen Booth (New Haven: Yale, 1977), xiii.

# Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge Mark Pence, who formatted, selected fonts, even designed the title page, along with offering sagacious editorial advice. Whatever fault may be found with the composition of this text, its *orchestration* must be deemed impeccable.

Mr. Pence and I jointly thank our colleagues at Cambridge Scholars Publishing, notably Amanda Millar, Rebecca Gladders, and Adam Rummens, for their many facilitations.

# Part I

# The Shakespeare Project

# The Shakespeare Project XXXI

## Re-viewing an old "nutshell," which harbors "Infinite Space" (*Hamlet*, II.ii.249–50)

### Texts

Dryden, John. *All for Love*.
Nabokov, Vladimir. *Pale Fire*.
Shakespeare, William. *Antony and Cleopatra*.
*Timon of Athens*.
Vendler, Helen. *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*.

### Paragone[1]

The question of "Who wrote Shakespeare" I have all but dismissed—perhaps out of hand. My "one foray into that breach"[2] treats the subject almost purely from a stylistic standpoint. The Bard's imagination differs fundamentally from Francis Bacon's, and his cadences vary considerably whereas Marlowe's verse sounds (albeit magnificently) uniform. As for Edward de Vere, the Earl of Oxford, what little we *know* he wrote hardly warrants comparison. The presumption that the plays and sonnets belong to de Vere is founded on a class bias.[3]

But Marjorie Garber and other scholars (notably James Shapiro[4]) whom I greatly respect, and in Garber's case admire "on this side idolatry"[5], have recently prompted my reconsideration—though not of the Bard's identity (never; to my mind, Twain's reputed quip[6] constates the best, if not only viable contention: i.e., that another man named Shakespeare wrote Shakespeare). But Garber casts the query under "a certain Slant of light"[7] that warrants a different kind of scrutiny:

> It has always been my view that the fascination with authorship, and the tendency to support claimants other than William Shakespeare of Stratford, is a significant symptom both about *the greatness and cultural power of the plays* and about *the psychological and personal investments of the participants*. I take it seriously, and I am less interested in any "answer" or "solution" than I am in the enduring nature of the controversy.…
>
> Who is the author of Shakespeare's plays? Is it possible that, in this already overdetermined controversy, there is at least one more determining factor? *Is there something in the nature of these plays that somehow provokes, as it responds to the authorship controversy?...It has long been noted that Shakespeare's plays are full of questions of authority, legitimacy, usurpation, authorship, and interpretation. Indeed, drama as a genre not only permits but encodes the dissemination of authority.… Can the "Shakespeare Question" be…in part a textual effect?*[8]

The italicized portions of Garber's passages (the gilding yours truly's) beg (in the productive sense of *elicit*) the question comprising our primary concerns. From marking "the personal investments of participants" and "the dissemination of *author*ity" that dramas, notably the Bard's, encode (such that "the 'Shakespeare Question' [proves] in part a textual effect"), 'tis but a step toward reconfiguring—and from interrogative to declarative mood, so as to focus on three specific case studies out of myriads—*Who wrote Shakespeare?* as *Who Rewrote Shakespeare.*

Prior to proceeding to the aforementioned exemplars, some words about the works predicating their endeavors, texts which—our seminar *is* titled *The Shakespeare Project* and, notwithstanding the respective mastery of his inheritors, The Bard occupies a higher niche in the pantheon—justly garner the greater share of our attention. And to contextualize these words within commentary on method, for—even if we grant W. H. Auden's elevation of *Antony and Cleopatra*,[9] and G. Wilson Knight's comparable coronation of *Timon of Athens*;[10] even should we buck Helen Vendler's preference for the "Young Man" sonnet sequence (*S*1–126) over the "Dark Lady" collocation (*S*127–52)[11], we could of course, and have featured, in multiple complementary combinations, any of the plays. Yes—*any*; though grant a greater

benefit accrued from a dozen-odd, including our pair, and you can likely deduce their confederates. *Viz*., *Hamlet*, *Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Othello* (Bradley's Famous Four[12]), *I Henry IV*, *Henry V*, *Richards II* and *III*, the comic contingent of *Twelfth* and *Midsummer Night*[*'s*], *As You Like It*, the disparate "romances" of *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Tempest* and *Winter's Tale*; the titanically problematic *Measure for Measure* and *Merchant of Venice*. But don't dispense with either *Coriolanus* or *Henry VIII* or make nothing about *Much Ado*; and we would hardly do without *Love's Labour's Lost* especially since its pendant *Love's Labour's Won is* lost[13]; and consider too the charms of *Shrew*, how *Troilus and Cressida* compels thought, how the visceral music of *Cymbeline* and *Pericles* genuinely *strikes* us. And what if the nascent *Titus Andronicus* warrants Eliot's derogation as "one of the stupidest and most uninspired plays ever written"[14], why sacrifice to nescience so exquisite a villain as Aaron; worse still to neglect Faulconbridge in *King John*, who paves Hamlet's way, and…and…and…. One oughtn't keep silent about the rest (those "happy few"[15]: *Julius Caesar*, *All's Well That Ends Well* [really, two formidable works; and now add] *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *I,II,III Henry VI*, *The Merry Wives* [featuring Falstaff redux]); and herein this paragraph lies the rub[16], that EVERY Shakespeare play exhilarates in one way or countless others.

Hence, the *modus operandi* of *The Shakespeare Project* from its inception five and twenty years ago. Rather than rifle through, say, fifteen plays in scattershot survey—closely study (any) two to six, and thereby inculcate a method. Learn to read well one Shakespeare play, and the oeuvre lies open for your lifelong enjoyment. Let me add that each drama owns its own cachet of Sonnets, not necessarily (indeed, not likely) composed in conjunction with that particular tale. Still, when construed as fourteen line laboratories for experimenting with ideas—and reflexively, taking a discrete play as "a field of action"[17], for themes or effects to roam in preparation for condensation—the large and little mutually inform one another—coalescing, but also, in the words of Robert Frost, "hold[ing] each other apart in their places as the stars do."[18]

To return now to the other authors who have refracted, this semester, our Shakespearean scope: in each instance, we address why

and how one rewrote the Bard—their particular relation to the originary text.

**In conjunction with *Antony and Cleopatra* (c1606), John Dryden, *All for Love* (or *The World Well Lost*) (1678).** Coincident with his considerable poetic and dramatic gifts, Dryden numbers among the great early modern literary critics; is justly credited for rekindling and refining the analytic fires that burn through the present day. In "An Essay of Dramatic Poesy" (1668), he echoes his predecessor in *belles lettres*, Sir Philip Sidney[19], that plays are meant to delight, but also instruct. Accordingly, he takes the Ancient dramatists to task: "instead of punishing vice and rewarding virtue, they have often shown a prosperous wickedness, and an unhappy piety.… there is no indecorum in any of our modern plays, which if I would excuse I could not shadow with some authority from the Ancients."[20] Shakespeare, treating an ancient theme, Dryden may have tacitly impugned likewise. In his Preface to *All for Love*, he lauds the one shared facet of various re-presentations inspired by the Bard: "I mean the excellency of the moral; for the chief persons represented were famous patterns of unlawful love; and their end was accordingly unfortunate." But that consensus, again, comprises playwrights "after Shakespeare."[21] Norman Rabkin *explicit*-ates the distinct delineations:

> Shakespeare makes it impossible for anyone who responds fully to feel certain that Antony ought to reject his splendid mistress and share the domination of a mean world with insentient Octavius and imbecile Lepidus, or that he ought to renounce the grandeur of his martial manliness and his obligation to the austere idealism of Rome so that he may trifle away his time in sensual dalliance with a scheming, mercurial, and aging playmate. The power of the play derives in good part from the full and satisfying reality Shakespeare gives to each of the poles to which the hero is drawn,…he makes opposed understandings of what life is all about equally and poignantly attractive….
>
> Such is not the case in *All for Love*. Dryden insists that we sympathize with the plight of his protagonists, staging scene after scene in which tears are the appropriate response, but he never for a moment leaves us in doubt as to how to judge the action.

Even the "lovers condemn themselves, never denying the operation of standards which they, like everyone else in the play, hold paramount, the hegemony of reason and the sanctity of domestic order…."

> The tension in the characterization of Antony arises not from the struggle between opposite forces within him which the audience is led to recognize as conflicting goods in life itself, but rather from the spectacle of his self-hating entrapment by a passion about which he knows better.[22]

One might wonder why Dryden would excise a considerable amount of the ambiguity in which inheres the splendor of Shakespeare's tragedy.[23] Let us rather examine whether, and if so how, *All for Love* succeeds notwithstanding (or indeed due to) its simplified criteria. For a similar streamlining governs the style. Dryden all but takes for granted that "everyone was willing to acknowledge how much our poesy is improved by the happiness of some writers yet living; who first taught us to mold our thoughts into easy and significant words—to retrench the superfluities of expression—and to make our rhyme so properly a part of the verse, that it should never mislead the sense, but itself be governed by it."[24] Whereas the Bard, for all his greatness ("He was the man who, of all…poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul…; when he describes anything, you more than see it, you feel it too"), Dryden arraigns for occasional "insipid[ity]," "bombast," and most contrary to the premium on expressive "eas[e]," "wit degenerating into clenches."[25] Such complex expression[26], which has discouraged some from engaging the Bard, I hope, with you, to more than justify—champion rather. We'll take our cue from Sir Frank Kermode, whose *Shakespeare's Language* theorizes an intentional (and increasing over the course of the career) ruggedness in articulation, replicating *minds in action*.

> We register the pace of the speech, its sudden turns, its backtrackings, its metaphors flashing before us and disappearing before we can consider them. This is new: the representation of excited, anxious thought, the weighing of confused possibilities and dubious motives; the proposing of a theory of explanation followed

> at once by its abandonment or qualification, as in the meditation of a person under stress to whom all that he is considering can be a prelude to vital choices, emotional and political."[27]

However remarkable, this expressive mode runs counter to the values embraced in Dryden's era (which heralded the prose ideals of generations up through our own): "Almost all the important writers of the last third of the [seventeenth] century…are united by a common practicality of outlook, evenness of temper, and studied plainness of style."[28] Somewhat paradoxically—though not entirely so, since the manner foregrounds logic and neatness—these prose virtues were paralleled by a predilection, in poetry and on stage, for rhymed couplets. Nevertheless, again in the prologue to *All for Love*, Dryden concedes "imitat[ing] the divine Shakespeare; which that I might perform more freely, I have disencumbered myself from rhyme." "Not that I condemn my former way," he adds at once.[29] Which begs (again, *positively*—i.e., *prompts*) questioning to what degree Shakespeare's influence took Dryden outside himself; in some respect, *did Shakespeare write Dryden?*[30] On the other hand, one might contend that the Bard brought his admirer *more into Dryden's own*: "I hope I may affirm, and without vanity, that by imitating him I have excelled myself throughout the play."[31]



*I'll example you with thievery:*
*The sun's a thief, and with his great attraction*
*Robs the vast sea: the moon's an arrant thief,*
*And her pale fire she snatches from the sun;*
*The sea's a thief, whose liquid surge resolves*
*The moon into salt tears; the earth's a thief,*
*That feeds and breeds by a composture stolen*
*From general excrement, each thing's a thief;*
*The laws, your curb and whip, in their rough power*
*Have uncheck'd theft. Love not yourselves; away!*
*Rob one another.*

*Timon of Athens, IV.iii.441*

More provocatively than *Antony and Cleopatra* and Dryden's application, our second pairing interrogates the knotty nature of influ-

ence. As Samuel Schuman notes and then opines, **"Nabokov chose for the title of his novel a phrase from Shakespeare which invokes the notion of a lesser light reflecting a greater one. It seems to me that the unavoidable conclusion is that *Pale Fire* is explicitly meant to stand in just such a relationship to Shakespeare's incandescence in *Timon of Athens*."**[32] No doubt; and yet the content of the passage summons T. S. Eliot's observation that

> Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different. The good poet welds his theft into a whole of feeling which is unique, utterly different from that from which it was torn;…[33]

And in his "Foreword" to Schuman's study of *Nabokov's Shakespeare*, Brian Boyd, upon taking us on a "swift tour through some Shakespearean sites in *Pale Fire*," submits "just how un-Shakespearean, how uniquely Nabokovian, Nabokov is, as well as steeped in Shakespeare. No more for Nabokov than for John Shade [the poet *in* the novel] does Shakespeare's capacity to inspire other writers mean 'influence' in a sense anything like imitation."[34]

No one in the past century has reflected more on, or imposed more influence on Influence, than Eliot: "A good poet will usually borrow from authors remote in time, or alien in language, or diverse in interest."[35] Schuman corroborates in our instance, regarding genre and personality:

> It is the nature of theater, and it is particularly the nature of Shakespeare's theater, that the author disappears behind the work. Nobody in Shakespeare's plays speaks for Shakespeare, not even Prospero. He is not Hamlet or Lear or Timon or Puck or Juliet. He is behind all those characters, but those characters each speak for herself or himself. Nabokov (and many other novelists, of course) is the opposite. He injects himself into his fiction. He never lets us forget Nabokov, just as Shakespeare does not ask us to remember that there is a Shakespeare. Nabokov reminds us that his characters *are* characters [and, one might add, *his* characters], that they do what he makes them do. He appears as a character himself in his fiction…. Shakespeare disappears into his plays; sometimes Nabokov's novels disappear into Nabokov.[36]

The later Master engaged the Bard *hygienically*, "as a form of resistance training…."

> No one has ever resisted the norms of language—the natural rhythms, the set idioms, the expected images, the grammatical grooves—more boldly and incessantly than Shakespeare. Any writer lucky enough to understand Shakespeare in the original should train in his or her mental gym in order to learn to *dare* in every phrase, to write "by a free act of will" [pun indubitably intended] rather than by following "the faded ribbon of tradition."[37]

But mental exercise *merely* does not register as influence. *Pale Fire* snatches from English Literature's brightest Sun, and welds into a Nabokovian whole Shakespeare's terrifying depiction of how, first living in a harmful fiction of his own devising, a man subsequently retreats into an actual cave. From a technical perspective, Nabokov adopts and adapts *Timon*'s "bifurcated form," plausibly for "triangulation" purposes.[38] Then, too, we need account for *Hamlet* haunting the novel, for the ghost *in Hamlet*, King Hamlet's ghost, likewise invokes the seminal image:

> The glowworm shows the matin to be near,
> And gins to pale his uneffectual fire.
>
> (*Ham.* I.v.90)

The motifs of "Who's there?" (*Ham.*I.i.1) and suicide which riddle Shakespeare's tragedy, shed effectual light upon these matters in the later text. Such serious concerns also fuel Nabokov's precocity: "*What's* in a name" (*RJ*, II.ii.43)? The "Index" to *Pale Fire* insinuates that the eccentric protagonist, Charles *Kinbot*e, who often muses on the plausible merits of not being, proves an anagrammatic bogey concocted by one V. *Botkin* (who "himself might his quietus make With a bare bodkin" [*Ham.* III.i.74]).



> *[T]he aesthetic of the sonnet sequence…reduces the world to a very few personages—the lover, his beloved, his rivals. To those accustomed to the wide social sweep of fiction, this reduction may seem a defect. But it is a mistake to think of lyric as acting in a world*

> *smaller than that of other literary fictions. On the contrary, it acts in the only world there is—the world extending vertically from the Trinity (S105) to hell (S129), and from east to west (S132). Lyric enlarges its personae to fill that cosmic space: the personages of lyric are so great that the world can contain only two or three of them at once.*[39]

**Our sojourn with the *Sonnets* consists in part of exploring how *we* rewrite Shakespeare.** Dame Helen Vendler, whom I've quoted above, defines drama in lyric poetry as "formal mimeses of the mind and heart in action."[40] Hence, a la *Hamlet* (III.i.87), cogitation constitutes action in more than merely name. But the Dark Lady Sequence, "with its jealousy, its sexuality, its ambiguous 'darkness,' its betrayals, and so on," Vendler likens to *Othello*. We ought too construe that unit comprising Sonnets 127–52 under a lens through which *Macbeth* may be perceived—i.e., as *psychomachia*, a drama wholly contained in the mind.

Yet these two models don't alone suffice, because a sonnet, let alone a series of such, functions other than does a play, albeit analogously. Vendler continues:

> The true "actors" in lyric are words, not "dramatic persons"; and the drama of any lyric is constituted by the successive entrances of new sets of words, or new stylistic arrangements (grammatic, syntactical, phonetic) which are visibly in conflict with previous arrangements used with reference to the "same" situation…. Thus, the introduction of a new linguistic strategy is, in a sonnet, as interruptive and interesting as the entrance of a new character in a play. And any internal change in topic…or any change in syntactic structure…are among the strategies which—because they mimic changes of mind—constitute vivid drama within the lyric genre…. The art of seeing drama in linguistic action proper (action that may be as simple as the grammatical change in a given passage from nouns to verbals and back again—see sonnet 129 [and we shall witness therein]) is an art that has lapsed, even in interpreters whose criteria appear to be literary rather than political or psychological.[41]

That from a magnificent contemporary critic; Vendler's art, in her *Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, "of seeing drama in linguistic action

proper," becomes a prototype for our own practice. That is, we learn from her own re-writing, in this instance, of the Bard—akin to which act, of course and of splendid necessity, we engage upon in collaborating with, truly co-composing any text. In fact, "text" in modern critical parlance definitively denotes that which is read. "[G]ood readers," reflects Jorge Luis Borges, "are poets as singular, and as awesome, as great authors themselves." "There is no...man or woman...that's not a writer, potentially or in fact. [O]f the many kinds of pleasure literature can minister, the highest is the pleasure of the imagination." All but needless to say that good reading is predicated on honestly reacting to the author's cues. "Reading...is an activity subsequent to writing—more resigned, more civil, more intellectual."[42] Certainly as genial and cerebral; "more resigned," the action of reading? Plausibly, in the sense of more, i.e., additional, *re-signing*, of the prior procedure of the poet—who "fulfills himself," remarks a man in the know, "as he sees his imagination become the light in the minds of others."[43] A just aperçu of our—Shakespeare's, Dryden's, Nabokov's, yours and mine, et al. (e.g., Helen Vendler's, Frank Kermode's) collective enterprise in this seminar.

## Notes

1. Conventionally, "a formalized controversy about the status of the painter in society, especially in relation to that of the poet" (Frank Kermode, "Introduction" to *Timon of Athens*, in *The Riverside Shakespeare* [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997], 1490). Yet as *Timon* commences on a paragone, I thought "to crush [the term] a little" (cf. *Twelfth Night*, II.v.140), and loosely apply it to these introductory remarks, which pertain to relative modes of creativity.
2. Cf. *Henry V*, III.i.1. To echo the King precisely: "Once more unto the breach, dear friends,…"
3. *See* "Bowling for The Bard," in Ethan Lewis, *The Shakespeare Project and Ensuing Essays* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2015), 55–75.
4. *See* Shapiro, *Contested Will: Who Wrote Shakespeare?* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010).
5. How Ben Jonson glossed his regard for the Bard (albeit in that infamous context wherein he chided his fellow for insufficient editing. Though the example Jonson cited betrayed [in that particular passage] *his* paltry comprehension of the Bard's irony). Jonson, *Timber: Or Discoveries Made Upon Men and Matter* (1641); rpt. in

Alexander Witherspoon and Frank J. Warnke, *Seventeenth-Century Prose and Poetry*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1982), 118–9.

6. Plausibly apocryphal, for in *Is Shakespeare Dead?* (1909), Twain sides with the Baconians.

7. Cf. Emily Dickinson, Poem 258 (Johnson's enumeration)—but replace the painful circumstance prompting her line with the wise words of Ludwig Wittgenstein: "If one looks at something in the right way, one then understands it." *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (Boston: Little, Brown, 1960), 118–9; David Pears, *The False Prison: A Study of Wittgenstein's Philosophy*, Vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 19.

8. Marjorie Garber, *Shakespeare's Ghost Writers; Literature as Uncanny Causality* (New York: Routledge, 2010), xiv, 17.

9. "If we had to burn all of Shakespeare's plays but one—luckily we don't—I'd choose *Antony and Cleopatra*." W. H. Auden, *Lectures on Shakespeare* (1946–7), rec. and ed. Arthur Kirsch (Princeton, 2000), 242.

10. *See* "The Pilgrimage of Hate: An Essay on *Timon of Athens*," G. Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire: Interpretation of Shakespeare's Tragedy*, intro. T. S. Eliot (Cleveland: Meridien, 1930). To Knight, the brilliant, "idiosyncratic" (Eliot) critic/actor/director, the play epitomizes Shakespeare's genius. Knight likewise calls *Timon* "the most masterly deliberate…of somber tragedies."

11. Cf. Helen Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets* (Harvard, 1997), 3–4.

12. Cf. A. C. Bradley's classic *Shakespearian Tragedy* (1904).

13. Whether a sequel to *LLL*, or the alternative title of another play (either *Taming of the Shrew*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, or [practically inconceivably] *Troilus and Cressida*)—hence, merely "eponymously" lost—remains a matter of dispute.

14. "Seneca in Elizabethan Translation" (1927), T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays 1917–1932* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1932), 67.

15. Cf. *Henry V*, IV.iii.60.

16. Cf. *Hamlet*, III.i.64.

17. From another William [squared]; cf. "The Poem as a Field of Action" (1948), William Carlos Williams, *Selected Essays* (New York: Macmillan, 1954), 280–91. Though I must acknowledge poaching from the good Doctor W. for a different context. Williams plies the phrase principally to limn a "battle"ground for displacing conventions with new structures.

18. Robert Frost, "The Prerequisites" (1954); rpt. in Elaine Barry, *Robert Frost on Writing* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1973), 139.

19. Cf. Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry* (1579). The ethical injunction derives from Aristotle through the Renaissance theorists.

20. John Dryden, "An Essay of Dramatic Poesy," rpt. in Witherspoon and Warnke, *Seventeenth-Century Prose and Poetry*, 584.

21. Dryden, "*Antony and Cleopatra* and The Art of Tragedy" (1678), Witherspoon and Warnke, 617–8.

22. Norman Rabkin, *Shakespeare and the Problem of Meaning* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1981), 67–8.

23. In retrospect, I've qualified (*qv*. "considerable amount") Dryden's attenuation of complexity, for as Rabkin acknowledges, the pair evoke commiseration. Beaurline and Bowers go too far, in my opinion, presuming "for most of us…the overwhelming opinion is that for such a love we would indeed lose the world"; too farther still strays Dr. Johnson, who all but explicitly censures Dryden for precisely the reason Dryden arraigned the Bard: "by admitting the romantick omnipotence of Love, he has recommended as laudable and worthy of imitation that conduct which, through all ages, the good have censured as vicious, and the bad despised as foolish." Yet that this trio of critical titans should register such views certainly underwrites our pity for the protagonists. (*John Dryden, Four Tragedies*, eds. L. A. Beurline and Fredson Bowers, Curtain Playwrights Edition [Chicago, 1967], 193; Samuel Johnson, *The Lives of the English Poets* [1779], Vol. 1; rpt. London: Oxford, 1952, 257.)

24. "An Essay of Dramatic Poesy," 579.

25. Ibid., 595.

26. *Complex* pertains to the level of components in a system. A complexity has multiple components. As distinct from *complicated*, which denotes a high degree of difficulty. A complication likely entails complexities—i.e., things are rarely complicated without also proving complex. Yet the measure of complexity oft exceeds that of complication; and complexity proves less complicated than complication. Sometimes I feel that students fail to credit themselves (or me, for that matter): to comprehend the apparently too complicated devolves in many instances on engaging complexities. Shakespeare, and literary criticism, are eminently comprehensible—and their complications far less forbidding (even attract us) when we recognize such subjects as complex, and work with them accordingly.

27. Frank Kermode, *Shakespeare's Language* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2000), 16–7.

28. "Introduction: Seventeenth-Century Prose," Witherspoon and Warnke, 14.

29. "*Antony and Cleopatra* and The Art of Tragedy," 621.

30. In this regard, reflect on Dryden's subtitle, *The World Well Lost*, a moniker almost indulgent toward the lovers (q.v., the critiques remarked in note 23, above). To return, too, to Rabkin's commentary: grant "leav[ing no] doubt as to how to judge the action"; nevertheless, "Dryden insists that we sympathize with the plight of his protagonists, *staging scene after scene in which tears are the appropriate response*" (i.a.). That "full and satisfying reality Shakespeare gives to *each of the poles* to which the hero is drawn"—to both duty and "pleasure now" (*AC*, I.i.47; Shakespeare "[wo]n't suggest that the world is destructive without showing it in all its seductiveness" [Auden])—seems to have swayed the dramatic moralist. Somewhat at cross-purposes Dryden regrets including Antony's wife, Octavia. "I had not considered that the compassion she moved to herself and children was destructive to that which I reserved for Antony and Cleopatra [sic!]; whose mutual love, being founded upon

vice, must lessen the favor of the audience to them, when virtue and innocence were oppressed by it." But precisely that opposition predicated by Octavia's role would, as he remarks, further prejudice the audience against the adulterous pair. And why note in this context "the compassion…I reserved for Antony and Cleopatra"? Dryden consolidates his curious regret with one of his hallmark similes: "the dividing of pity, like the cutting of a river into many channels, abated the strength of the natural stream" ("Art of Tragedy," 618).

31. "Art of Tragedy," 621.

32. "The Lunatic, the Lover, and the Poet," Samuel Schuman, *Nabokov's Shakespeare* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 94.

33. "Philip Massinger" (1920), Eliot, *Selected Essays*, 182.

34. Brian Boyd, "Foreword" to *Nabokov's Shakespeare*, vii.

35. "Philip Massinger," 182.

36. *Nabokov's Shakespeare*, 160–1. Such consumption of one's characters differs markedly from the generosity of another twentieth century master stylist, William Faulkner, who presumes to "follow behind his characters with a pen."

37. Boyd, "Foreword," ix, quoting Nabokov.

38. Cf. Schuman, 98–100: "If a work can present the same plot, characters, and thematic materials from two very divergent points of view, the audience, if it can assimilate both perspectives, can gain a far sharper and more accurate view of the material." I shall contend that, at least in *Timon*'s case, the poles on which triangulation is founded collapse.

39. Helen Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets* (Harvard, 1997), 547–8.

40. Vendler, 4.

41. Ibid., 3–4.

42. Jorge Luis Borges, *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (New York: Penguin, 1998), 3 ("Preface" to *A Universal History of Iniquity* [1935]), 111 ("A Survey of the Works of Herbert Quain" [1944]).

43. Wallace Stevens, "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" (1942), Stevens, *Collected Poetry and Prose*, sel. Frank Kermode and Joan Richardson (New York: Library of America, 1997), 660–1.

# On *Antony and Cleopatra* (and Enobarbus)

**Biggest stage**: Vis-à-vis *AYLI*, "All the world's a stage" [II.vii.139], in *AC*, the stage genuinely all the world. (Cf. *Sonnet 112*.5ff, ironically applicable to our protagonists, in what appears at times their contraction of the entire empire to the lover: "You are my all the world, and I must strive To know my shames and praises by your tongue…In so profound abysm I throw all care Of others' voices,…Mark how with my neglect I do dispense: You are so strongly in my purpose bred That all the world besides me thinks th'are dead.")

**Little language**: "Shakespeare's use of a particular word or set of words to give undercurrents of sense to the dramatic narrative is, of course, a device used in later literature—it is a feature of E. M. Forster's novels and a trick also of Virginia Woolf's. Bernard, the writer in *The Waves*, says he is tired of stories and longs "for some little language such as lovers use, broken words, inarticulate words, like the shuffling of feet upon the pavement." Shakespeare's "'little language' may be a muttered undersong to the main tune of the narrative…, or it may blare out like a trumpet entry" (Kermode, *Shakespeare's Language*, 218).

In *AC*, the principal word fanfared: "world," uttered forty-four times in the drama. Samples from the first two acts limn central strands in the narrative: "Take but good note, and you shall see in him The triple pillar of the world transform'd Into a strumpet's fool" (I.i.11); "—when such a mutual pair And such a twain can do't…the world to weet We stand up peerless" (I.i.36); "The third o' th' world is

yours…" (II.ii.63); "for it cannot be We shall remain in friendship, our conditions So differing in their acts. Yet if I knew What hoop should hold us staunch from edge to edge O'th' world, I would pursue it" (II.ii.112); "My Octavia, Read not my blemishes in the world's report" (II.iii.45); "To you all three, The senators alone of this great world,…" (II.vi.8); "Wilt thou be lord of all the world? ...I am the man Will give thee all the world…. These three world-sharers, these competitors, Are in thy vessel. Let me cut the cable And when we are put off, fall to their throats: All there is thine" (II.vii.61ff.).

The "undersong" (not always muttered, at times murmured cravingly—a medley of "pleasure" and "will," buttressed by "now" and "lies" [with "lies'" punning connotations] *viz*.: "There's not a minute of our lives to stretch Without some pleasure now. What sport tonight?" (I.i.46); "I will to Egypt; And though I make this marriage for my peace, I' th' East my pleasure lies" (II.iii.40).

N.B. the plethora of verbed nouns (e.g., "companion me with my mistress," "fortune him accordingly" [I.ii.29,75], "And that which most with you should safe my going" [I.iii.55], "the holes where eyes should be, which pitifully disaster the cheeks" [II.vii.15], "The ne'er yet-beaten horse of Parthia we have jaded out o' th' field" [III.i.33], "I shall see some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness" [V.ii.219]; and just prior to that, [my favorite:] "He words me, girls, he words me" [V.ii.191]). These constructions *energize language*, but prove emblematic also of the attempt *to galvanize the enervated*. For here inheres the rub largely predicating A. and C.'s romance. Power notwithstanding, their "way of life" [not *just* their life, *vide infra*] "Is fall'n into the sear, the yellow leaf" (*Macb*. V.iii.22); both have seen better "salad days" (I.v.74). That keynote is sounded by but the fourth word in the play, "Nay but this *dotage* of our general's O'erflows the measure" (I.i.1; note the enjambment enacting profligacy), with "dotage" denoting not infatuation simply, but the onset of imbecility symptomatic of old age. "The enemy of the play is the passage of time," Auden observes [*Lectures on Shakespeare*, 231], thence elaborates on the inevitable comparison:

> The love between Romeo and Juliet is the first affair for both of them. They discover sexual love, each other's existence, and their own, they discover that there are more things in the world than being the child of one's parents. But *Antony and Cleopatra* pres-